

# ABeCeDarian Error Correction

Helping teachers  
respond to errors  
productively

Imagine a person who is taking tennis lessons for the first time in her life. After a brief demonstration, the instructor gently hits a ball to this pupil and she swings. But instead of arcing gracefully back over the net as her instructor had just demonstrated, the ball flies wildly out of the court, scattering some pigeons that had gathered by a trash can.

If the instructor responded to this effort only by saying, “Well, that was a bad shot” and then immediately proceeded to hit more balls, the tennis student would have reason to be upset. The instructor’s response has done almost nothing to help her understand what went wrong. She doesn’t need someone to tell her that she hit the ball poorly. Rather she needs some coaching to help remind her how to position herself to hit the ball, how to shift her weight, how to hold her arm and wrist as she strikes the ball.

Unlike the negligent tennis instructor in this example, most school teachers recognize the importance of good error correction and their role as instructional coaches. When a student makes a mistake, they try to help him analyze and understand it. Beginning teachers, however, may have to fumble about for quite some time before they achieve any kind of precision in responding to errors. Experienced teachers may have a good repertoire of error correction response but on occasion unwittingly skip important steps if they don’t have some sort of template to refer to so that they can double-check themselves. And all teachers are at some times quite perplexed about how to deal with a particular error a student makes.

This error correction guide addresses these problems. It presents a simple template of classroom-tested responses that will make any teacher using the program more comfortable and productive. If used properly, it will help prevent her students from becoming frustrated as they undertake the amazing and often complicated task of learning how to read.

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## *Correcting letter/sound errors*

General error  
correction template

In ABeCeDarian, a teacher should usually handle errors regarding letter/sound knowledge by telling the student the correct information and having him repeat it. Then the teacher has the student apply the corrected knowledge again in the same reading or spelling task the student had trouble with. Nothing is gained here by any lengthy discussion or explanation. The student has some faulty knowledge, and the teacher quickly and accurately gives him the correct information.

For example, a student may make a letter/sound knowledge error when he writes or sees the letter *f*, but says the sound /t/. The teacher would say simply: *This is /f/. You say /f/.* The teacher would have the student write

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or point to the letter several times while repeating its correct sound and she would be sure to return to the same letter in a few seconds to make sure the student remembered the sound.

A slight modification of this technique is advisable in Level B when a student makes a mistake with a vowel digraph, such as *ea*, *oy*, or *ai*. In this case, instead of telling the student the sound, the teacher should point to the appropriate key word on the Spelling Chart found on the last page of the Level B1 Teacher Manual.

## Correcting word reading errors

When a student makes an error reading or spelling a whole word, in contrast, a more nuanced and sophisticated response is in order because reading and spelling words involve not only knowledge of letter/sounds, but also skills at blending the sounds of the word together and then comparing the word pronounced with the word that is written. Telling the student the answer directly does very little to help the student understand what part of this complex chain of steps wasn't executed properly.

What's needed instead is a response that helps the student understand exactly why his answer isn't correct. A very simple way to accomplish this task is to repeat the student's response and point out the mismatch between the letters on the page and the sounds in the word.

Suppose, for instance, the student looks at the word *mop* and says *map*. The teacher would say: *You said /map/ with an /a/ here. But we have /o/. Tap-and-say the word and try again please.*

This response very precisely lets the student know what part of his answer doesn't match and thus helps him know what to modify when he tries the task again.

It is important to note how this response differs from a very common response teachers often make when a student reads a word incorrectly: *Look at the word again.* The problem with this response is that it doesn't really tell the student what to look for, so he is left guessing what he has to modify or correct when he tries again. What is missing from this response is sound, specifically, the sounds the student said. Reading always involves two things: something seen and something heard. To become an accurate reader, therefore, what the student needs to do is not only to see the symbols correctly, but to rapidly compare what he says for a word with the letters on the page. In other words, what the student needs to get good at is a kind of comparison. When teachers leave out the sounds when correcting reading errors, they don't give the student anything to compare, and hence

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fail to help him improve a critical component of reading.

The table below summarizes the two basic kinds of error correction response in ABeCeDarian:

<b>Error</b>	<b>Response</b>
Letter	Tell student correct sound and have him repeat several times  If the error involves a vowel digraph presented in Level B, show him the appropriate key word in the Spelling Chart
Word	Repeat student's response and point out the mismatch

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### *Always end on perfect performance*

In addition to following this general template, teachers will help their students dramatically if they remember two additional principles. One is that they must be sure to have the students end all of their work with perfect performance. In other words, once the teacher works with a student to correct an error, the student needs to redo the task until he performs it correctly, preferably more than once. Otherwise, students will have practiced an incorrect response more than the correct response and hence will be more likely to recall this when he reads a particular word or says a particular letter/sound again.

### *Distribute practice*

The other principle to keep in mind is a fundamental law regarding practice. The best way to get information into long-term memory is to distribute brief reviews over time. If a student has exceptionally severe difficulties learning material, the time interval can be a matter of a handful of seconds. For normal learners, though, intervals of many minutes up to a few hours are usually fine. Furthermore, additional practice and review daily is extremely important to help students retain and use what they are studying. The wise teacher therefore schedules 1-2 minute review sessions throughout the day, when lining up for lunch or recess or as part of the transition to a new activity.

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## Two important principles

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## Description of the following error correction guide sheets

The following error correction guide sheets are designed to help teachers learn these error correction techniques. There is a sheet for correcting oral reading errors, for correcting spelling errors, and several sheets detailing specialized error correction techniques for the Word Puzzle activity of Level A. (NOTE: There is no sheet outlining how to correct a letter/sound error, since, as described above, this is done quite straightforwardly by having the teacher tell the student directly the correct sound and having him repeat it several times.) Each sheet provides a general error correction template, an example, and several practice problems.

Since the word puzzle activity is the first activity students do in ABeCeDarian, and because there are, in addition, a number of different kinds of errors that students can make, it is extremely helpful for teachers to be able to respond to these errors quickly, precisely, and productively. Teachers who are just learning how to teach students in Level A would greatly benefit from starting to learn the ABeCeDarian error corrections techniques by focusing on these Word Puzzle corrections. As they practice these corrections, they should note how these specialized responses for the Word Puzzle activity still adhere to the general format of correcting letter/sound errors directly and correcting word reading errors by echoing the students response and helping him find the mismatch.

Teachers learning how to work with students in Level B need only study the oral reading and spelling sheets.

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Oral Reading Errors	Response
	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Template</u></p> <p>Repeat student’s mispronunciation: <i>You said . . .</i></p> <p>Point out the mismatch: . . .<i>with a &lt;sound&gt; here. But . . .</i></p> <p>Tell the student to try again: <i>Please tap-and-say the word and try again.</i></p>
<b>Example</b>	
Student looks at <i>mop</i> and says <i>map</i>	<p><i>You said /map/</i></p> <p><i>with an /a/ here. (Point to “o.”) But this is /o/.</i></p> <p><i>Please tap-and-say the word and try again.</i></p>
<b>Practice</b>	
Student looks at <i>sat</i> and says <i>sit</i>	
Student looks at <i>tap</i> and says <i>cap</i>	
Student looks at <i>cat</i> and says <i>sat</i>	

With an advanced student the teacher can respond by asking the student to figure out the mismatch himself. For example, if the student read *mop* as *map*, the teacher could ask the student: *Why can’t this be /map/?* If the student needs help answering the question, the teacher can run her finger under the word slowly while saying it, elongating each continuant sound.

If a student makes a response that doesn’t make sense, (e.g., the word isn’t a real word or is ridiculous in context) the teacher should begin her error correction by asking, as appropriate: *Does that make sense? Is that a real word?* In Level B, when students will be reading words with graphemes that can represent several different sounds, students are likely to read words with a possible sound for a grapheme that isn’t right for the particular word. For example, a student might read the word *cow* as /koa/ (to rhyme with *glow*). The teacher should respond by asking the student if that makes sense, and then underlining the *ow* and saying, *“This can be /oa/. What else can it be?”* encouraging the student to try its other sound. This technique is referred to in ABeCeDarian as “flexing.” If a student doesn’t know another sound for the grapheme in question, the teacher should point to the appropriate key word on the Spelling Chart, found at the back of the Teacher Manual for Level B.

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Spelling Errors	Response
	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Template</u></p> <p>Pronounce student's word: <i>Your wrote. . .</i></p> <p>To help point out the mismatch, run your finger slowly under the student's word and repeat the target word elongating each continuant sound: <i>But we want &lt;target word.&gt;</i></p> <p>Ask the student what doesn't match: <i>What doesn't match?</i></p>
<b>Example</b>	
<p>Student hears the word <i>tap</i> and writes <i>fat</i></p>	<p><i>You wrote "fat"</i></p> <p><i>But we want /tap/.</i></p> <p>As you say /tap/, run your finger slowly under what the student wrote (i.e., "fat") and elongate each continuant sound.</p> <p><i>What doesn't match?</i></p>
<b>Practice</b>	
<p>Student hears <i>mop</i> and writes <i>sat</i></p>	
<p>Student hears <i>sat</i> and writes <i>sit</i></p>	
<p>Student hears <i>cat</i> and writes <i>cap</i></p>	

If the student cannot figure out what the mismatch is after receiving this support, the teacher should tell him. After the student has spelled the word correctly, he should say and write it a few times, looking at the correctly spelled word as he does so. Then the teacher should cover up the word and have the student spell the word again from memory.

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<b>Word Puzzle Errors</b> <b>(Level A only)</b>	<b>Response</b>
<p><b>Student identifies a sound in the word but puts it in the wrong position</b></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Template</u></p> <p>Place the letter for the sound the student says in the correct spot on the puzzle: <i>In &lt;word&gt; the &lt;echo student's sound&gt; goes here.</i></p> <p>Repeat the question the student got wrong: <i>What's the &lt;first, next, last&gt; sound in &lt;word&gt;?</i></p> <p>When you pronounce the word, you should elongate each continuant sound while running your finger under the lines in the puzzle.</p> <p>After the student completes the whole puzzle, say: <i>Great job! Let's try that one more time.</i></p> <p>Mix up the letters again and have the student complete the puzzle from the beginning.</p>
<p><b>Example</b></p>	
<p>Student says first sound of <i>fat</i> is /t/</p>	<p><i>In "fat" the /t/ goes here. Put the letter "t" on the last line of the puzzle.</i></p> <p><i>What's the first sound in "fat."</i></p> <p>As you say the word <i>fat</i>, elongate each continuant sound and run your finger slowly under the lines in the puzzle.</p> <p>After the student completes the whole puzzle, say: <i>Great job! Let's try that one more time.</i></p> <p>Mix up the letters again and have the student complete the puzzle from the beginning.</p>

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<b>Word Puzzle Errors</b> <b>(Level A only)</b>	<b>Response</b>
Student identifies a sound in the word but puts it in the wrong position (continued)	
<b>Practice</b>	
Student says the first sound of <i>sat</i> is /t/	
Student says second sound of <i>tap</i> is /p/	
Student says second sound of <i>cat</i> is /t/	

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Word Puzzle Errors (Level A only)	Response
<p><b>Student identifies a sound that is not in the word</b></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Template</u></p> <p>Pronounce the word as it would sound with the phoneme the student has identified: <i>That would make &lt;pronounce the word with the sound the student said.&gt;</i></p> <p><i>&lt;But we want &lt;repeat target word&gt;.&gt;</i></p> <p><i>Let's try that again. What's the &lt;first, next&gt; sound in &lt;target word&gt;?</i></p> <p>As you say the word, elongate each continuant sound and run your finger slowly under the lines in the puzzle.</p>
<b>Example</b>	
<p>Student says first sound of <i>fat</i> is /p/</p>	<p><i>That would make "pat."</i></p> <p><i>But we want "fat."</i></p> <p><i>Let's try that again. What's the first sound in "fat."</i></p> <p>As you say <i>fat</i>, elongate each continuant sound and run your finger slowly under the lines in the puzzle.</p>
<b>Practice</b>	
<p>Student says the first sound of <i>sat</i> is /m/</p>	
<p>Student says the second sound of <i>pot</i> is /a/</p>	
<p>Student says the last sound of <i>cat</i> is /p/</p>	

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<b>Word Puzzle Errors</b> <b>(Level A only)</b>	<b>Response</b>
<b>Student says 2 or more sounds</b>	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Template</u></p> <p><i>&lt;Echo what student said&gt; is two sounds.</i></p> <p><i>What's the first sound in &lt;echo what student said?&gt;</i></p> <p><i>As you say the syllable, elongate each continuant sound and run your finger slowly under the appropriate lines.</i></p>
<b>Example</b>	
Student says second sound of <i>mop</i> is /op/	<p><i>/op/ is two sounds.</i></p> <p><i>What's the first sound in /op/?</i></p> <p><i>As you say /op/, elongate each continuant sound and run your finger slowly under the second and third lines of the puzzle.</i></p>
<b>Practice</b>	
Student says second sound of <i>sat</i> is /at/	
Student says first sound of <i>tap</i> is /ta/	
Student says second sound of <i>pot</i> is /ot/	

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<b>Word Puzzle Errors</b> <b>(Level A only)</b>	<b>Response</b>
<b>Student says correct sound but chooses the wrong letter</b>	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Template</u></p> <p>Point to the letter the student used and tell student the correct sound: <i>You wrote &lt;correct sound for letter the student chose.&gt;</i></p> <p>Point to the correct letter for the sound and say the sound: <i>This is &lt;target sound.&gt; You say &lt;target sound.&gt;</i></p> <p>Have the student point to the correct letter and say its sound several times. Have the student write this letter on the correct line: <i>Now you write &lt;target sound.&gt;</i></p> <p>After the student has completed the word puzzle for the word, have him do the puzzle again from the start.</p>
<b>Example</b>	
Student says first sound of <i>mop</i> is /m/ and writes “p”	<p><b>Point to /p/.</b> <i>You wrote /p/.</i></p> <p><b>Point to /m/.</b> <i>This is /m/. You say /m/.</i></p> <p>Have the student point to /m/ and say it several times.</p> <p><i>Now you write /m/.</i></p> <p>After the student has completed the word puzzle for the word, have him do the puzzle again from the start.</p>
<b>Practice</b>	
Student says second sound of <i>mop</i> is /o/ and writes “p”	
Student says first sound of <i>tap</i> is /t/ and writes “a”	

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<b>Word Puzzle Errors</b> <b>(Level A only)</b>	<b>Response</b>
<b>Student says the name of the letter instead of the sound</b>	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Template</u></p> <p><i>That's the name of the letter. What sound do you hear?</i></p>

<b>Word Puzzle Errors</b> <b>(Level A only)</b>	<b>Response</b>
<b>Student doesn't respond at all</b>	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Template</u></p> <p>The teacher conducts the Word Puzzle as usual but answers her own questions and writes the appropriate letters on the lines herself.</p> <p>Once she has completed the puzzle, she has the student tap-and-say the word a few times and then has him try the puzzle himself from the beginning.</p>